

HOUSEHOLD FURNISHINGS

352 BEDS AND TABLES.—The primitive Indian bed, which has practically disappeared, consisted merely of a layer of tree bark, Heliconia leaves, or deer skin, spread on the ground; it is known among the Miskito by the name *puhlak taya* "balsa tree bark," while the Sumu call it *takal* (T., P.) and *lim* (U.).

Nowadays stages of split bamboo serve indiscriminately as beds and tables. These structures (M.: *krikri*; S.: *kirikiri*) are raised about 3 feet from the ground and are supported by four strong posts. Instead of sheets of bamboo the whole may be covered with wild cane sticks. Sheets of pounded tree bark serve as blankets and as bed sheets (M.: *nina-pala*, *munta-pala*; T., P.: *dañ-rina*; U.: *dañ-paknak*); in Honduras the Miskito also use mats (*tnasi*) made from a rush growing around the swamps and lagoons. Pillows (M.: *tilar*, corrupted from the English; S.: *tunana*) are stuffed with cotton or the fiber surrounding the seeds of the silk cotton and of the balsa trees. The Miskito living at the mouth of Rio Patuca slice the upper part of the stem of the small "palmetto" palm, which grows in the neighborhood, and use the thin flakes to stuff pillows and mattresses. The mosquito nets, called *pabulo* by both tribes, are made of opaque cotton sheeting of foreign manufacture, so that each bed forms practically a separate compartment.

824 HAMMOCKS.—While at home, hammocks (M.: *silmika*; S.: *wah*) are seldom used during the night, and then only by unmarried boys and girls. They are, however, carried along on long journeys. During the day the men dream away much time in the hammocks, but the women use them rarely. They may be made of cotton, tree bark, or Bromelia fibers.

854 CRADLES.—In former days cradles (M.: *kulsañ*; T., P.: *pala*; U.: *lim*) were used by the Sumu in connection with the habit of flattening the heads of babies. (See under Deformation of body.) Since this practice has gone out of use cradles have disappeared entirely and small hammocks are now used for the children. The dried claws of crabs and other objects were tied to the cradle, making a strange rattling noise at each movement.

352 STOOLS.—Low wooden stools (M.: *sulati*; T., P.: *sini*; U.: *panba*) with three or four legs and a flat or concave surface, hewn from solid blocks of wood, are used by the women, unless they sit directly on the ground. They may be square or oblong and suggest the stone metates found in the ancient sites. They range in size from diminutive forms used as toys by the children to benches of over 3 feet in length. When a stranger arrives at the Indian hut one of these seats or a hammock will immediately be offered to him.

CHEST.—Wooden chests or trunks, known by their English names, 352●
are used to store clothing and valuables. They may be of foreign
manufacture or made locally from the Spanish cedar (*Cedrela* sp.).

ILLUMINATION.—Pine-wood torches are used for illuminating pur- 354
poses. In certain regions where the pitch pine (*Pinus tenuifolia*
Benth.) is absent or scarce the Indians make rude candles by sur-
rounding a cotton thread with beeswax or with the gum of certain
trees, as the rubber tree (*Castilla* sp.) or the locust tree (*Hymenaea*
courbaril L.). Small baskets, filled with big tropical fireflies, are also
used occasionally as lanterns by children.

VARIOUS.—The products of the plantation are generally thrown on 356
the floor or put on the tables or in the attic. Little shelves are sus-
pended from the rafters in order to keep cooked food, meat, or fruits
free from the numerous creeping and crawling insects which infest
the dwellings.

Under the roof are seen the various tools, the fishing and hunting
implements; they are stuck in the thatch or held in crude racks. From
the rafters depend bags of pine-wood soot, bottles with red pigment,
and hair oils or small *pispis* gourds (*Lagenaria vulgaris* Ser.) contain-
ing shot.

DOMESTIC UTENSILS

FIREMAKING.—Fire was produced formerly by the "twirling" 372
method. A notch was made in a piece of wild cane and a hard-wood
stick placed in the cavity. This stick was held perpendicularly and
twirled rapidly round and round until fire was produced. Cotton
was used as tinder. A very curious method practiced by the Sumu
or Paya of Rio Patuca has been described by the Franciscan mission-
ary Fernando de Espino.²¹

Steel and flint were introduced in early days for kindling fire, but [77]
have now been replaced practically everywhere by matches of foreign
manufacture.

FIRE FAN.—In order to accelerate the flame a dozen feathers from
large birds, generally the guan (*Penelope cristata*) are tied together
in the shape of a fan (M.: *kusu-taya*; S.: *uhlawa*).

TONGS.—Among the Miskito of Pearl Lagoon bamboo tongs or 412
tweezers may occasionally be seen, to pull roasted plantains, cassava

²¹ Ha criado Dios en lo mas retirado de la montaña un bejuco muy largo, sin,
mudos, a manera de ramas de mimbre; cogen esta y cortanla en trozos pequeños
de a palmo; pónenlas al humo, y en estando bien secas, cuando han menester
fuego, cogen una, y con las dos palmas de las manos la estrujan como al molinillo
para hacer chocolate, y cuando ellos ven que está de cierto temple, soplan una
punta o extremidad y por la otra parte sale fuego, y se enciende como mecha de
escopeta, porque el en sí es estoposo por de dentro. De otro modo sacan fuego,
que se el común de los indios, estragando un palo con otro (Serrano y Sanz: 367-368)

342 time rectangular houses with a hip roof used by single families are built. The steep roof, thatched with palm leaves, was supported on posts. All houses have walls about 4 feet (1.3 m.) high. Lofts for storing food and for sleeping are made by laying split bamboo sticks across the beams.

- 352 Household furniture consists of mattresses of bark or deerskin, platform beds (*Paya* and *Northern Sumo*), sitting hammocks, wooden chests, three- or four-legged stools, and a notched-post ladder. Fires are built
- [354] of three logs on slightly raised mud platforms inside the houses. Stored
- 445 near these are cooking pots, bamboo tongs used to remove food from the fire, gourd containers and colanders, wooden spoons, ladles, and sections of bamboo used to haul water and to store beverages.

DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

- 291 Bark cloth was formerly the most common fabric, but it is now being replaced by cotton cloth, usually obtained by trade. Native cotton cloth was used largely for ceremonial and festive occasions. The *Mosquito* made blankets and clothing of palm fiber.

The male costume consists of a breechclout and poncho. The latter is tied under the arms and secured around the waist with a belt. Everyone went barefoot, but occasionally *Paya* men wore tapir-hide sandals and *Mosquito* men moccasinlike footgear. Women wore a knee-length, wrap-around, bark-cloth skirt, but the upper part of their bodies was nude. Children went nude until they were 8 or 10 years old, when they adopted a breechclout (*Sumo*, *Mosquito*, *Paya*). *Sumo* chiefs used a long tunic and a sash, apparently made of cotton. It was dyed and embroidered with crane feathers. These costumes, or modifications of them, are still

- [177] worn by the more conservative tribes, but commercial cloth is becoming more common and European styles are being adopted.

- 302 Men cut their hair short, but occasionally elder men left a lock at the back of the crown (*Mosquito*). In about 1850 the *Sumo* tied their hair into a queue, which was oiled or greased; at present they cut it short with bangs over the forehead. A crude comb was made of sticks tied together. Women cut the front hair in bangs allowing the rest to hang freely. The men attached feathers to their hair but women decorated

- [307] theirs with flowers and colored bands. At time of mourning the hair is cut off short. Both sexes devote considerable attention to their hair.

- 301 Nose pins and lip and ear ornaments of gold or turtle shell were worn. The *Mosquito* hung shell or brass plates from the lower lip. Conical or bell-shaped lip or chin ornaments were worn by the *Kukra*. Wooden plugs worn in the ear lobes were common. On festive occasions the *Mosquito* and *Sumo* wore either a cotton headband decorated with feathers or a cap made of bamboo decorated with feathers and with long, painted, bark-cloth streamers. The *Mosquito* hung metal or shell plaques and ornaments made of bone and feathers about their necks. *Sumo* women

415 Both the *Paya* and the *Northern Sumo* occasionally use elaborately carved metates and well-made manos obtained at ancient ruins. The *Mosquito* made large wooden mortars and single-ended or, more rarely, double-ended pestles.

412 Tools used for working wood and for fashioning many miscellaneous articles were: Scrapers made of fish teeth, turtle shells, or stone and knives made of split bamboo. Three-legged wooden stools were formerly richly carved, often having a bird or animal head. Spoons, ladles, cradles, and the like are also made of wood. Gourds are often engraved with simple geometrical designs (pl. 36, bottom).

411 **Weapons.**—*Mosquito*, *Sumo*, and *Jicaque* bows are 4 to 5 feet (1.3 to 1.6 m.) long, *Paya* specimens 6 feet (2 m.) long. They taper toward the ends and are rectangular in cross section. Killing arrows have a cane shaft and palm-wood foreshaft. Points of flint, obsidian, turtle shell, fishbone, and shark and alligator teeth were being replaced by iron ones as early as 1678 (Exquemelin, 1678). Arrows are not feathered. According to Exquemelin, the arrows used about the Laguna de Bluefields (*Kukra*) were 6 to 8 feet (2 to 2.6 m.) long with a flint tip and a wooden hook (possibly some type of barb?). Some arrows were weighted with pebbles. Stunning arrows have blunt knobs made of hard wood or beeswax.

The *Uwa* and *Paya* make blowguns, possibly only toys, from a reed 18 inches (45 cm.) long. These shoot wax pellets. The blowgun is, even among Hispanicized *Jicaque*, an effective weapon. It is bored from a branch of a certain tree, and clay pellets are carefully made by means of a gage (Von Hagen, 1943, pp. 50-52). The *Mosquito* and *Sumo* probably used the blowgun, but present information is not precise.

Arrow poison has been reported from some *Mosquito* tribes. Bancroft says that this was made from the juice of *Hippomane mancinella*. Conzemijs did not observe this tree in the territory but mentions the possibility that the secretions from a frog (*Dendrobates tinctorius*) may have been used. The former poison is used by the *Carib*, and both types are used by the *Cuna* and *Chocó*.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

622 Little is known of the aboriginal organization of these tribes. Both chiefs and shamans had great power. Local governments now control the villages, but during the Conquest these tribes were organized for war in various ways. Chiefs were elected by the elderly men and their power was supreme. The office was not hereditary, but among the *Mosquito* a nephew or son-in-law of a chief might succeed him. The whole *Mosquito* tribe, under British guidance, was united and ruled by a "king" who carried as insignia a staff and a gold or silver breastplate.

361 streams. The villages and their populations were studied from Bilwas Karma to San Carlos. (See map.) The villages themselves are perched up high on the banks so that floods will not carry them away.

342 Once a house site has been determined the Indians clear the bush and all large trees, that may endanger the house in case of storms, are felled. The house is usually of rectangular design. Four posts or more are used to hold up a sharp sloping thatched palm leaf roof (*bahna*). In many houses these roofs extend to about five feet off the ground. The posts are usually of ironwood. Several varieties are used for thatching. [824] such as the *cohune* (*Attalea cohune*), *skomphora*, *cola de gallo* or *suita* (*Calyptrogyne sarapiquensis*) and *caña danta* (*Geonoma* sp.). These palm leaves may last from four to five years as a roof. Although many Indians use nails today, lianas are still used to bind these structures together. The sides of the houses may be made of split bamboo or boards. Most houses have a sort of loft (*tint*) immediately beneath the roof. It is formed by laying split bamboo or boards across the beams and is reached with the use of a ladder. Various forms of bamboo wattlework may make up the interior walls. Most of the dwellings seen have the floor elevated from the ground at a distance of three to four feet. Thus the houses appear to be set on a series of stilts.

Formerly long communal houses or multiple family houses were used by tribes. Today this practice is abandoned and the family type house is what is found. It must be noted, however, that although many houses are raised from the ground, one occasionally encounters a more primitive dwelling where the family live directly on the ground clay with just a low overhanging roof for protection. But this process can only serve as a temporary shelter since the torrential rains would quickly wash away the household effects.

352 Iron stoves for cooking are common in most houses and in some cases [343] the stove is in a separate house (cookhouse). Many old crates, wooden [354] boxes, and bamboo devices are used for tables and chairs. Beds are made of split bamboo and are raised on posts two to three feet from the floor. Recently hammocks have become popular in the area. They may be purchased from the traders or hand made with cotton, tree bark or Bromelia fibers. Small hammocks are used for children.

[373] Pine wood torches are used for illumination at night and in some cases fiber clusters are impregnated with oils or waxes and lit up. Under the roof the fishing, hunting and agricultural implements are kept.